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A P A P E R

ON THE NECESSITY OF

Open Spaces and Public Playgrounds

IN LARGE TOWNS.

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## THE NECESSITY OF OPEN SPACES AND PUBLIC PLAYGROUNDS IN LARGE TOWNS.

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When Pepys visited Bristol in the year 1668, and described the extent of the town as such that he could actually look round and see nothing but houses, this description caused wonder and admiration. In size and importance Bristol then stood second to London alone. Its population appeared prodigious. It contained 29,000 inhabitants. At the same period the population of Leeds was about 7,000; of Sheffield, Birmingham, and Liverpool about 4,000 each; and of Manchester, about 6,000.\* Now, three of these towns, at least, have far outstripped Bristol in the extent of their populations, yet Bristol, so far from having decreased, has quadrupled the number of its inhabitants. This unparalleled rapidity in the growth of large towns, accompanied as it has been with a progressive, and more than proportionate increase in the comforts and appliances of life, doubtless betokens a thriving state. Nevertheless, it has its drawbacks. Of these one of the greatest, if not the greatest, is over-crowding—the huddling together on a certain portion of land more human beings than can possibly live there in health and strength. The evils of this over-crowding are immense. To exaggerate them is almost impossible. Of death, disease, and immorality it is a prolific cause. Many it brings to an untimely grave, many more it condemns to a life of sickness and ill-health, in many more still it produces that feverish state of recklessness and unsettledness which is a pregnant source of wickedness and crime.

\*Macaulay's History of England, Vol. I. pages 335 and 340-44. Ed.: 1849.

Of the numerous deaths caused by over-crowding there is sufficient evidence in the reports of the Registrar General. From these we learn that in London, Birmingham, and Manchester the mortality among working men is *double* what it is in the healthy districts by which these towns are surrounded; that in Liverpool during the five years ending in 1858 the deaths actually exceeded the births by 55, so that, were it not for the constant immigration from the country, the population would decrease to such a degree that there would not be a sufficient number of adults to carry on the business of the town; that in 13 out of the 14 divisions into which the registration districts are divided this rule holds good—the rate of mortality increases with the density of population.

Below, in a note,\* I give a few statistics, but statistics, I fear, have little effect upon the general public. To the few who take the trouble to examine, and so to comprehend them, they are of infinite meaning and interest. They are an index to the state of the nation. They show that state as it is, and not as it appears to be. But to the majority, one pitiable object, seen with their own eyes, is far more affecting than the most painful table of statistics. Many are moved even to tears at the sight of misery who can hear of it with unruffled composure.

	Acres.	Population in 1851.	Deaths in 1851.	Persons per acre.	Deaths to 1000 living.
* London ..	78,029	2,362,236	55,488	30.28	23
Liverpool ..	2,220	258,236	8,754	116.21	34
Manchester } Township.. }	1,480	186,986	5,859	126.35	31
Birmingham.	2,660	173,951	4,989	65.40	28
Leeds .....	2,100	101,343	3,181	48.09	31
Carlisle ....	70,810	41,557	1,000	.59	24
Brampton ..	95,473	11,323	206	.11	19
Glendale ....	142,305	14,348	192	.10	14

	Acres to each person.	Annual mortality to 1000 living.
London.....	.04	25
Birmingham .....	.02	26
Liverpool.....	.01	36
Manchester (district) .....	.06	33
Leeds.....	.02	30
Glendale .....	9.96	15
Brampton.....	8.74	17
Carlisle .....	1.82	24

Calculated for the years from 1841 to 1850.

I owe these returns to Mr. Wm. Royston, who has kindly extracted them from the returns of the Registrar General.—See his valuable little Tract on the “Variation of the death rate in England.”



This should not be. If any substantial benefit is to be conferred upon the working classes by those who are interested in their welfare, it is absolutely necessary for these latter to convince themselves of the nature and extent of the evils by which those classes are affected. The disease must be known, before a cure is proposed. The miserable state of things depicted in the reports of the Registrar General must be realized and understood. These reports only mention the deaths caused by over-crowding, and the number of these is appalling, yet of all the evils attributable to this source, death is perhaps the least. This is saying a great deal. For, surely, the reckless waste of human life is a great calamity, surely it is sad to know that numbers die before half their natural course is run, that numbers who were born to be strong and healthy men and women, sicken in the noon of life, and waste away into an early grave. But death appears a blessing when compared with the many other evils attendant upon over-crowding; the pain, the sickness, the filth, the disease, and the thousand gross immoralities, and brutish vices and degrading crimes, of which it is undoubtedly the first and strongest cause. It saps the strength of manhood, undermines the constitution, engenders multitudinous disorders, and produces that languid, morbid exciteable temperament which often hurries men into serious crimes, and still oftener seeks alleviation in drink only to find it in death.

It is to the immorality caused by over-crowding that I would now especially call attention. It will be found that this immorality is more the effect of physical than of moral causes. There are two kinds of over-crowding. Either too many people may be crammed into one house, or too many houses may be built on a certain portion of ground. The former is chiefly the case in our country villages, the latter in our manufacturing towns. Both are productive of immorality, but in different ways. In an over-crowded house the necessary disregard paid to the decencies and proprieties of life, quenches all true modesty, and produces a shameless indecency, and loose morality. In an over-crowded town the effect of bad air upon the system, and the utter want of needful recreation, produces that state of feeling which often impels men into vice and drunkenness.

Of the deleterious effects of bad air there is but one opinion amongst medical men, and physiologists. It is poison, the effects of which, in many cases, prove fatal,—in all injurious. In ill-ventilated and over-crowded houses the evil results are certainly greater and more apparent than in simply over-crowded districts. To them the example quoted by Mr. Lewes applies. “The deaths of new born infants between the ages of 1 and 15 days, which in the Dublin Lying-in-Hospital amounted in the course of four years to 2,944 out of 7,650 births, were suddenly reduced to only 279 deaths during the same period, after a new system of ventilation had been adopted. Thus more than 2,500 deaths, or 1 in every 3 births, must be attributed to bad ventilation.”\* In many over-crowded closely packed streets and alleys similar evil effects are produced, but in a less degree. In these the foul and vitiated air, for foul and vitiated it often is, deranges the system of the inhabitants, and frequently produces that depression of the spirits which leads men to seek excitement for a cure. It doubtless causes many premature deaths, but still more does it cause disease and vice. But in the words of Mr. Lewes “although burking and gagging are crimes which appal the public, that public seems almost indifferent to the milder form of the same murder when it is called want of ventilation.\*

Equally, or almost equally injurious to health is the want of exercise; at least, without it it is impossible for men, and especially young men, to be thoroughly healthy. To urge its importance seems almost ludicrous—no one doubts it. Upon this point all Englishmen are agreed. It is the pride of our Universities and Public Schools that there every manly exercise and athletic sport is encouraged and cherished. Such exercises are justly considered to have a most beneficial effect upon the moral characters of those who engage in them. Not only do they increase health, but they promote virtue, and diminish vice. Even in increasing health they increase also mental culture—for they produce that sound body, without which the sound mind is almost an impossibility—but they do infinitely more than this. They fill up advantageously that spare time which if not

\*Lewes's Physiology of Common Life, Vol. I. pages 372-3



so filled up is generally spent in vice and dissipation. They teach men their own strength ; they make them self-reliant ; they produce those feelings of vigorous independence, and manly self-respect, which glory in a noble, and scorn a base action. They afford most wholesome enjoyment, based upon that beneficent arrangement of Providence, by means of which the exercise of our powers and faculties produces pleasure and satisfaction. Yet, to the large majority of the working classes these exercises, which have so happy an effect in moulding the character of the rich man's son, are an impossibility.

Then, with regard to young children, exercise is, if possible, a still greater essential to them. Who of the richer classes would ever dream of bringing up their children without affording them almost unlimited opportunities for play and recreation ? During the first years of childhood the greater portion of time is spent in it. It is almost the business of early life, and it is while sporting about and playing, while frisking in the fields and gardens, while bowling their hoops, and while spinning their tops, and handling their diminutive spades and rakes, that children, unknown to themselves, develope their tiny frames, and lay the foundation for the future strength and ability of manhood. Were the children of the rich to be deprived of this play, many who now live would die, and many more who are now strong and robust would be weak and sickly. And this is the case with the working classes. For that play which the rich encourage and delight to behold in their own offspring, and without which that offspring would not be what it is, the children of the poor have no place, nor opportunity, and they suffer accordingly. Their only playground is the street, and to play in the street is illegal. The law of nature within them prompts, or rather almost compels them so to do ; but obedience to this law is an infraction of municipal law, and the latter is the stronger. So they yield to fate, and take the consequences.

This radically bad state of things should not be allowed to continue, and any remedy, even though only a partial one, should be adopted with eagerness. A plan proposing such a remedy has for some time been before the public, but hitherto it has attracted little attention.

It is that for establishing Public Playgrounds in various parts of large towns. Such open spaces would afford suitable places for recreation, and, by preventing too close building, would do much to purify the air. It may be said that such grounds are already supplied by the Public Parks. The Public Parks, however, excellent and beneficial as they are, do not supply the want now referred to. To a great extent they tend to lessen the impurities of atmosphere, for the space now occupied by them cannot be built upon; but they are too far apart to supply the lungs which a town like Manchester requires. For playgrounds they are far too distant from the houses of the majority of the working classes to be available for that purpose. To expect mothers to carry their children one or more miles from their own homes for the purpose of play, or to suppose that boys and young men are likely, after a hard day's work, to undertake a fatiguing walk to a place of recreation, when the time consumed in the walk should have been devoted to the game, is simply absurd. They will not do it. If the children and youth of the working classes are to have recreation, suitable places must be provided near at hand. To facilitate the procuring of such places two Acts of Parliament have recently been passed.

These Acts are due to the continued and zealous efforts of Mr. Slaney, M.P. for Shrewsbury. The one entitled an "Act to facilitate grants of land, to be made near populous places, for the use of regulated recreation of adults, and a playground for children," was passed in April (19th), 1859. This Act extends to England and Ireland only. After recognising the great want of Recreation Grounds in large towns, it ordains that private individuals may convey land to trustees to be held by them for public grounds, subject to such conditions as the grantor may think fit: that with respect to lands belonging to any Municipal Corporation, such grant may be lawfully made by the body corporate, with the consent of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury, signified by their executing the Deed of Conveyance: that with respect to Parish lands, the grant may be made by the Trustees or Feoffees (if there shall be such), or otherwise by the Churchwardens or Overseers of the Parish,



in pursuance of a resolution for that purpose of the Vestry or other body having the management of the affairs of such Parish, passed in meeting duly assembled for the purpose, with the approbation of the Poor Law Board, to be testified by their seal being affixed to the Deed of Conveyance. It further arranges for the appointment of Trustees, and the enforcement of bye-laws.\* The other, entitled “An Act to enable a majority of two-thirds of the ratepayers of any parish or district, duly assembled, to rate their district in aid of Public Improvements for general benefit within their district,” was passed in July (3rd), 1860. By this it is enacted that ratepayers may purchase or lease land, and may accept gifts and grants of land, for the purpose of forming Public Walks, Playgrounds, &c., and may levy a rate not exceeding sixpence in the pound, provided always, that previous to any such rate being imposed, a sum in amount not less than at least one half of the estimated cost of such supposed improvement shall have been raised, or collected by private subscription or donation.†

What use the different towns will make of the facilities afforded by these two Acts of Parliament remains to be seen. That Manchester may take advantage of them is sincerely to be hoped for by every one who wishes well to the town. It can hardly be expected that Public Playgrounds should be provided in the centre of the town. Beneficial as such open spaces would be to the inhabitants generally, I fear land is too dear to be procured. But, if it be impossible to remedy past evils, it is quite possible to prevent future ones. In the suburbs of the Town—in Broughton, Cheetham Hill, Bradford Road, Ancoats, Ardwick, Longsight, Chorlton-on-Medlock, the neighbourhood of Hulme and Pendleton, there are at present large plots of ground still un-built upon. Rugged and uninviting as they are such grounds literally swarm on fine days with boys and young men playing at cricket and other games. Soon they will be built upon—the suburbs will become as the centre of the town, and the respectable youths who now live there will be driven by the force of circumstances to spend their time in the same low, degrading, pernicious amusements in which so many of the inhabitants of Deansgate and Angel Meadow now indulge.

\*Sec. 22nd Vic., cap. 27.

†23 and 24 Vic. cap. 30.



These open plots of ground in the suburbs might now be procured at a comparatively cheap rate. Soon their value will be greatly enhanced. At the present time an opportunity is offered of procuring them. If let slip, it cannot return. The great obstacle is, doubtless, expense. That open spaces and Playgrounds are beneficial and necessary, many acknowledge, "but how is it possible," they ask, "to raise the large amount of money which would be required to carry out such plans?" That the outlay in the first instance would be very great is true, but if the result of such outlay was a general improvement in the health of the town, and a considerable diminution in the numbers of deaths, and in the amount of crime and disease; money, so spent, would be as economically laid out as it is when sunk in works of drainage, or other municipal improvements. The Act of Parliament provides that half the amount required be raised by rates, and the other half by voluntary subscription. To raise this latter ought not to be impossible. I use the word "ought" advisedly, and for the following reasons.

If professions are to be believed—if the words uttered by the mouth are any index to the feelings of the heart—there never was a time in the world's history when the interest taken by the higher in the welfare of the lower classes was as great as at present. It is said to be the feature of the age. Lord Macaulay, in enumerating the signs of a progressive civilization in England during the present century, specially dwells upon this. "It is a merciful age," he says. Foreign statesmen have remarked upon the zeal and energy with which Englishmen organize societies for the benefit of their fellow creatures. To promote this benefit many books have been written, endless speeches made, numerous societies formed, and one great Mammoth Association—that for the advancement of social science—called into being. The avowed object of such books and speeches, and societies, and associations is to discover the causes of social evils, but if, when the causes are discovered, and adequate remedies accordingly proposed, it be objected to the application of such remedies that they are too expensive—the sooner such societies and associations be broken up, and such books burnt, and such

speeches disowned, the better. They are all useless. To seek for the cause of an evil, when it is known beforehand, that upon the discovery of the cause no remedy will be applied, is simply a waste of time. Benevolent men and philanthropists must show their faith by their works, not by their words. The very essence of philanthropy is self denial. Without it all benevolence becomes only the worst form of hypocrisy and deceit. If the expenditure of a large amount of money be required for the welfare of the working classes—if public Playgrounds are essential in large towns for their health, and for their morality—the self-denial which the raising of such an amount will necessitate on the part of the rich cannot be an insuperable obstacle, unless we accept the painful alternative that the assertions of scoffers are true, and the philanthropy of Englishmen is false, and the benevolence of public men assumed merely to win the plaudits of their audiences.

One more objection may be urged. Much has already been done for the working classes, and the results anticipated have not been attained. That during the last twenty years much has been done for the improvement of their condition is most true, but to say that the good anticipated has not been accomplished is a mere assumption. What extraordinary results some expected, it is impossible to say. Doubtless, the sanguine anticipations of many who had implicit confidence in certain schemes, as though they were universal panaceas for all social evils, may have been disappointed. The working classes are certainly not now what they ought to be—not what we should like them to be—but that they have improved greatly in almost every respect during the last thirty years will be evident to every one who carefully reviews their state during that period. In sobriety and cleanliness, in education, and in their domestic habits, in thrift and in their power of organization, they have made great advances. Of almost every facility placed within their reach—of the Baths and Washhouses, the public Parks and Libraries, the numerous Schools and Mechanics' Institutes, the Savings' Banks and Co-operative Associations, the Sick and Clothing Clubs—they have taken advantage more or less. They have still



vices peculiar to their class, but if, notwithstanding all that has hitherto been done for them, those vices are almost the necessary consequence of their condition, to bring them up as accusations is most unreasonable.

Those who do so should remember a remark made by Washington to some members of Congress who had been indulging in the agreeable pastime of grumbling. In reply to their complaints of the short-comings of his soldiers, he assured them that "it was a much easier and less distressing thing to draw up remonstrances in a comfortable room by a good fireside, than to occupy a cold bleak hill, and sleep under frost and snow, without clothes or blankets." So with regard to the rich man and the operative, there are two points of view from which the state of the latter may be contemplated—and the view from one point is very different to that from the other. To the gentleman who at the conclusion of the day's business sits at his mansion at Eccles or Didsbury, surrounded with every luxury and comfort that money can procure, cracking his walnuts and sipping his claret in a social circle of friends, the view is very different to what it is to the occupant of Cupid's Alley or Lad Lane, who, having spent a quarter of an hour in "bolting" his tea, has before him three or four hours of utter vacancy. The one can philosophize on what has been done. The other feels what is left undone. The former, far removed from the scene he contemplates, passes in review the progressive state of the working classes, and dilates on the numerous comforts they now enjoy. With streets well paved, well drained, well lighted, well supplied with water, with schools close to their doors, with the best medical aid at hand, with libraries which universities might envy, and parks which noblemen might covet, surely the meanest artisan of the 19th century, say they, is better off than a prince in the times of the Saxons.

The other, probably, does not think, or reflect, or generalize, or compare his state to what it would have been had he lived 10, or 20, or 100 years ago. He feels—he feels it as it is, and it is this feeling which shapes and colors his course of life. He takes his circumstances as they are, and acts accordingly. So long as those circum-



stances are what they are, his moral condition will remain what it is—infinately better than it used to be, but still very bad. From early childhood through the years of boyhood up to man's estate the inhabitants of large towns have still two great wants with which to contend—the want of pure air, and the want of ground on which to take necessary recreation. These wants must be supplied, if their state is to be ameliorated.

It is sincerely to be hoped that this subject will meet with due attention from the people of this city. For my own part, I would suggest, that a society be formed with the object of taking advantage of Mr. Slaney's two Acts of Parliament for the benefit of Manchester and its neighbourhood; that the Sanitary Association co-operate with such society; that the society, in the first place, raise money by means of donations, and when a sufficient sum has been guaranteed, summon a public meeting to lay the matter before the ratepayers. Were such a society to be formed by the influential men of the town there would be little doubt as to its success.